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Summary record of the 14th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 27 May 2014, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Drobnjak (Vice-President) ..... (Croatia)

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In the absence of Mr. Sajdik (Austria), Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Sustainable urbanization

Opening of the segment

1. **The President**, opening the first ever integration segment of the Economic and Social Council, said that the Council's role in achieving a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development had been recognized by Heads of State and Government at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and further affirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution 68/1, which had established the integration segment as a forum in which Member States, the Council's subsidiary bodies, the United Nations system and civil society could promote ways of integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development as a critical input to the discussions in the high-level segment and the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Council.

2. The first integration segment would focus on sustainable urbanization, a theme chosen because of the growing impact of urbanization on sustainable development and the increasing importance of cities in reducing poverty, protecting the environment and improving disaster reduction and resilience. As the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda had pointed out, the battle for global sustainability would be won or lost in cities, and it was therefore from cities that the international community could learn about the ways in which urbanization could play a transformative role in the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development.

3. **Ms. Picco** (Observer for Monaco), Vice-President of the General Assembly, speaking on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, said that the challenges and opportunities of urbanization ranged from the creation of sustainable transportation to the provision of adequate services for growing populations, and from ensuring resilience to extreme weather events to building sustainable infrastructure and housing. With the right policies, urbanization could help address global challenges such as poverty, unemployment and climate change. The integration segment, with its focus on the three pillars of sustainable development, could help ensure that the international community made the most of the opportunities provided by sustainable urbanization.

4. In that regard, it was important, first of all, to ask how the contribution of urbanization to sustainable economic development could be maximized. Because cities accounted for 80 per cent of global gross domestic product, they were closely linked to the challenges of unemployment and poverty and must be made to function efficiently, so that it was easier to invest, conduct productive activities, and thus create more employment. Second, the role of urbanization in environmental sustainability should be considered, since cities, mostly in the developed world, accounted for 70 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions and should therefore address the impact of climate change, the world's most significant environmental challenge, while minimizing their contribution to it. Third, it was necessary to examine the role of urbanization in socially sustainable development, since poverty was increasingly concentrated in urban rather than rural areas. One billion people in developing countries still lived in urban slums, and sustainable development would be impossible unless their conditions improved. The Council must also consider how the economic, social and environmental aspects of urbanization could be integrated to ensure the maximum contribution to sustainable development, as well as asking what Governments and the international community could do to achieve such integration, and how urbanization should be reflected in the post-2015 development agenda.

5. The decision by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals to include the topic of sustainable cities and human settlements as a stand-alone focus area emphasized the importance of sustainable urbanization. The creative energies and resources of cities must be harnessed, because they would be the fertile ground in which sustainable development would take root.

6. **The Secretary-General** said that he was pleased to address the Council's first-ever integration segment. The General Assembly had taken a crucial decision in 2013 to strengthen the Council through an annual segment integrating the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. He welcomed government representatives, civil society

actors and business executives to the meeting. The Council was fortunate to have very high-level keynote speakers with expertise in different parts of the world. He looked forward to hearing their views and was grateful to the leaders who had taken time to participate in the current meeting, at which the international community would take a step towards harnessing the power of urbanization for sustainable development. That was central to achieving three interlinked United Nations priorities for 2015, namely, to reach the Millennium Development Goals; to shape an ambitious long-term vision for development; and to adopt a meaningful new global climate agreement.

7. Just as people converged in cities, so did global issues. Urban areas were at the heart of many great challenges and opportunities. People moved to cities for jobs and other opportunities, but too many cities faced challenges including weak infrastructure, unemployment and pollution. Climate change was increasing risks in all cities, where the poorest people were hit the hardest. The world was seeing daily disasters at unexpected times and places. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia had recently suffered their worst floods in more than a century. Jobs, businesses and economies in a number of cities across the region had suffered.

8. From his earliest days as Secretary-General, he had focused on urbanization and its wider implications for development. During his first month in that role, he had visited Kibera, a slum in Nairobi. He had immediately seen that to overcome problems in cities the international community must take a hard look at inequality. Many cities had very rich and very poor communities right next to each other, which was unsustainable and unjust. In order to learn about urban solutions, he had visited many projects, businesses and other initiatives in cities around the world. He had seen bamboo bicycles made in Ghana, mobile flood barriers in Prague, solar panels being produced in Abu Dhabi, Vilnius, Denver and Xi'an.

9. Cities were turning the climate challenge into a business opportunity. They were exploring ways of conserving and generating energy, finding innovative ways to recycle waste and creating better living conditions. People were the common feature to every success story and, in all of its plans and policies, the international community should think of the people affected. Urban transport policies should focus on the safety of women, access for persons with disabilities, and meeting the needs of all vulnerable people. When protected, such people would drive development. Efforts to encourage business activity should also promote corporate responsibility. Companies which protected labour rights, preserved the environment and prevented corruption could create an even better climate for business.

10. Education was essential. The world needed a generation of global citizens who used science and technology to develop green technologies that would further sustainable urbanization. The international community must strengthen the capacity of Governments to plan, construct and manage urban areas. That would require a close look at the ways in which resources were consumed, produced and managed, and how that affected overall quality of life.

11. In September 2014, he would convene a Climate Summit in New York, bringing together world leaders to help shape a collective, ambitious vision rooted in concrete action. The Summit would focus on solutions, and he encouraged all leaders to attend, since the international community needed their high-level commitment to tackling the climate challenge as the pivotal year of 2015 approached. The Council's discussions under the integration segment would contribute to the Summit, the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda. He urged the international community to make the most of the opportunities to usher in a sustainable future.

Keynote addresses

12. **Mr. Kagame** (Observer for Rwanda) said that urbanization was inevitable and would happen faster than ever before, particularly in Africa, which was currently the least urbanized continent but had a much higher urbanization rate than anywhere else. When people moved from rural areas to cities, they were exposed to new ideas, technologies, habits and skills, and learned to work differently; in other words, they became more productive. Whereas urbanization could help to reduce poverty sustainably in ways that handouts could not, growth without planned urbanization was a recipe for soaring inequality. The question was therefore not whether to urbanize but rather how to obtain the maximum benefits of urbanization. Increased productivity brought higher wages and enabled citizens to build a prosperous,

secure future. Millions would therefore continue to move to cities each year.

13. Rwanda shared with other African countries the challenges and opportunities of rapid urbanization, including the need to upgrade existing informal settlements and prevent the establishment of new ones in the future, to provide basic infrastructure and services, to mitigate inequality and the segregation of the poorest, to protect urban wetlands and green space, and to enable the private sector to create jobs. Urbanization was also part of Rwanda's unity and reconciliation efforts following the 1994 genocide. In its latest national development agenda, his Government had given high importance to environmentally friendly organized settlement. In the interests of efficient land use, it had established a legal framework for inclusive land registration and management and had built a national database of property records and land-use maps, providing the basis for a reliable property market. It would establish financing and supply options for affordable housing and related education and health services for low-income groups.

14. Innovation and cooperation were better responses to the risks of urbanization than alarm. Although social problems sometimes became more noticeable in urban areas, they were not necessarily more difficult to address and were sometimes easier to solve. For example, more basic services would be needed in cities but the larger scale meant that the money spent on such services would go further than in rural areas.

15. The role of urbanization in development policy would continue to be the subject of debate, because cities had to satisfy the needs of groups as diverse as industries, investors, real estate developers, the middle class, environmentalists and young people. Ambitious urban design in Africa should therefore not be equated with an anti-poor agenda, since not only the rich benefited from an orderly urban environment. Modern central business districts were important for sustainable economic growth in cities but were only part of a comprehensive approach to urbanization, which, in Rwanda, included better decentralization, enabling citizens to participate in decision-making, and an emphasis on accountable governance and zero tolerance to corruption, ensuring that urbanization resources were used appropriately.

16. African leaders had adopted a common position on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, including cities and human settlements, and would continue to work with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and other regional and global partners. Solutions which had worked elsewhere in the past might not work as well in Africa in the future, and African Governments would therefore adapt their approach as needed. Sustainable urbanization, however, was central to the development agenda because it was essential to citizens' well-being. If cities were to drive progress, people must be able to afford to live in them and travel to work. Leaders must maximize the benefits of urbanization by promoting orderly migration, investing in basic services and supporting affordable housing and transport. If the international community remained focused on those policies, Africa could become a middle-income continent within a generation.

17. **Mr. Garzón** (Colombia) said that since people were essential to sustainable development, the Council should ensure that human rights were upheld in all spheres of development. In April 2014, his Government had hosted the Seventh World Urban Forum, at which the post-2015 development agenda, including the vital topic of sustainable and inclusive cities, had been discussed. The Medellín Declaration, with which the Forum had concluded, had emphasized the need for a new urban agenda promoting people-centred urbanization. He had stated at the Forum that Colombia needed friendly city regions for citizens, in which well-being was fostered and human rights upheld.

18. By 2050 the urban population would comprise 9.6 billion people, who would aspire to enjoy their rights to health, education, safe drinking water, basic sanitation, peaceful coexistence, transport, a healthy environment, decent work and housing, access to land and a safe and inclusive city free of discrimination. States should uphold such rights by implementing sustainable development in urbanization. To that end, education, health and food security, which were part of human rights and sustainable development policies, must be addressed, taking a differentiated approach with respect to the specific needs of children, women, young people, persons with disabilities, persons of African descent, indigenous people, the lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and intersex population, older adults and other population groups. Sustainable urbanization was a means of realizing rights and achieving development. Just as sustainable development contributed to economic, social and

environmental development, rights could be upheld only under appropriate living conditions. Discrimination against citizens, in particular those with few resources, was not the solution. People were poor not by divine will but because of unequal distribution of wealth. More inclusive cities therefore needed to be built, in which low-income groups were seen not as the problem but as part of the solution. Cities must not remain divided into rich and poor areas, hotbeds of class war, but should allow peaceful coexistence reflecting policies of social equality. In today's world, low-income people had the right to take control of their own destiny.

19. Sustainable cities should be part of the post-2015 development agenda. National governments should understand that in implementing public policy they should work together with local and regional governments, taking into account people's needs. Citizens expected coordination among governments rather than polarization, and would remember not selfish leaders who promoted violence but those who dared to fight discrimination and social inequality, promoting peace and respect for human rights.

20. The integration segment was designed to ensure that United Nations agencies worked with the Secretary-General to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the sustainable development goals. It would be a positive outcome of the segment if meetings bringing together national, local and regional governments, the private sector and civil society were to be held on each continent, coordinated by the United Nations system, to assess whether cities were being built on the basis of a regional and human-rights approach, focused on the economic, social and environmental sustainability of both urban and rural areas.

21. **Mr. Bloomberg** (Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Cities and Climate Change) said that cities provided economic opportunities to people in search of a better life and their growth had reduced extreme poverty worldwide. They fostered freedom, tolerance and equality and were a haven for people whose rights had been threatened or who had faced persecution. They were centres of educational opportunity, technological innovation and economic growth. They were also essential to fostering environmental sustainability and addressing climate change. While cities accounted for 75 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, city mayors had executive powers to reduce such emissions and adapt to climate change risk, meaning that they did not need to wait for national Governments or global climate agreements in order to act.

22. His work as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Cities and Climate Change was urgent, since climate change was damaging crops, disrupting commerce and costing Governments billions of dollars which could otherwise be spent on infrastructure, social services and economic development. Without action, the problems would become much worse in years to come, particularly in coastal cities in developing countries.

23. Adapting to climate risk, however, could bring benefits, because local steps to improve sustainability attracted private investment and improved economic growth, public health and living standards. He had seen an example of such benefits at the Seventh World Urban Forum, in April 2014, in Medellin, Colombia, where outlying communities that had previously experienced high levels of unemployment and crime had been integrated with the business centre through a cable-car system in a way which minimized air pollution. In New York, investment in sustainability had made the city healthier, easier to live in, more integrated and more economically vibrant. The elimination of the "dirtiest" building heating oils, the establishment of new parks and the planting of 800,000 trees had reduced the city's carbon footprint and had improved air quality and life expectancy, thereby attracting more residents and creating new jobs. Other cities which had invested in sustainability had seen similar results. Cities of all sizes were reducing emissions and becoming more resilient. In Sorsogon City, the Philippines, which had been struck by typhoons, a resiliency plan had been developed to protect residents from extreme weather events, while in Maputo a rapid urban air quality assessment had been launched to locate the largest sources of emissions.

24. Cities were a leading force for climate action, with successful strategies being transmitted not only from wealthier countries to developing ones but also in the opposite direction. Bus rapid transit, for example, had been pioneered in Brazil in the 1960s and had then spread to New York, Paris and Guangzhou, China. Such transmission emphasized that cities worldwide shared the concerns not only of addressing climate change but also of protecting people from crime, creating jobs, collecting waste and reducing traffic.

Cities could therefore also help States to find consensus on sustainable development issues. To do so, they must work with national and regional governments. Some needed greater financial support or freedom to borrow money independently of national governments, while others needed more authority to reduce carbon emissions by taking control in the energy and infrastructure sectors. Governments should empower their cities to take climate action to save lives, strengthen national economies, make the cities themselves healthier and more economically vibrant and help combat climate change; the most successful cities had strong local governments.

25. He was working with the Secretary-General to show Governments that cities could make a significant contribution to achieving ambitious climate goals and to ensure the success of the Climate Summit 2014. He urged national leaders to attend the Summit in the interests of reaching a meaningful global climate agreement in 2015.

26. **Mr. Clos** (Executive Director, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)) said that urbanization was a transformative force shaping societies, economies and political systems. With the approach of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), amid continued discussions on the post-2015 development agenda, it was time to espouse a more coherent view of sustainable urbanization. History had not only demonstrated a positive correlation between urbanization and development, but had shown that urbanization was often a source rather than just an outcome of development, with the potential to transform production capacities and increase income levels in developing countries. However, urbanization should not be left to chance since while well-planned and well-managed cities and towns contributed to economic growth and sustainability, including by serving as markets for rural products, unplanned urbanization could be problematic.

27. The concentration of poverty was shifting from rural areas to cities, and policies were required to address the basic needs of poor urban dwellers, including housing, clean drinking water and safe sanitation. More efforts were also needed at the city level to address the challenge of climate change, bearing in mind that cities, mostly in the developed world, contributed some 70 per cent of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions. Lastly, both national and local authorities had an important role to play in achieving sustainable urbanization. While national governments should allocate resources and establish clear urban policies, local authorities should take responsibility for urban design, rather than leaving such decisions to the private sector.

28. *A panel discussion on the topic "How can urbanization policies promote integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development", moderated by Ms. Eugenie Birch (Lawrence C. Nussdorf Professor of Urban Research and Education, University of Pennsylvania School of Design), followed. The panellists were Mr. Joseph Roig (Secretary-General of United Cities and Local Governments); Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme); Ms. Skye Dobson (Executive Director, ACTogether Uganda, Slum Dwellers International); and Mr. David Post (Executive Manager, Global Smarter Cities, IBM). Mr. Kadir Topbaş (Mayor of Istanbul and President of United Cities and Local Governments) delivered a keynote address. The panellists made statements, and an interactive discussion ensued, during which the panellists responded to comments and questions from the moderator; the observer for the European Union; and a representative of the non-governmental organization New Future Foundation, in consultative status with the Council.*

Statements on the flooding in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia

29. **The President** said that the recent floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia had caused great loss of life and widespread material damage.

30. **Mr. Lagumdžita** (Observer for Bosnia and Herzegovina), speaking via video link from Sarajevo, said that the recent floods had left thousands of citizens without resources and his Government was grateful for the valuable support and assistance provided by the international community, including the United Nations. A reconstruction conference, focused on resettling those who had lost their homes, and finding new employment for those who had become unemployed as a result of the flooding, should be convened as early as possible.

31. **Ms. Pusić** (Croatia), speaking via video link from Zagreb, said that the floods had left over 17,000 people

homeless in Croatia alone. Though her Government had been able to respond to the immediate crisis, subsequent clean-up efforts would require the assistance of the international community.

32. **Mr. Milanović** (Serbia), speaking on behalf of the Prime Minister of Serbia, said that the consequences of the devastating floods would seriously undermine sustainable development in the region. With the equivalent of three months of rain falling in the space of three days, the resulting flooding had affected 1.6 million people and over 32,000 people had been evacuated from their homes. Roads, railways, bridges, buildings and power plants had been severely damaged, and over 80,000 hectares of arable land had been flooded. Although it was too early to assess the damage accurately, the economic cost was estimated at over 1 billion euros. His Government greatly appreciated the solidarity of the international community and hoped that the United Nations would play a leading role in Serbian reconstruction efforts. It had already submitted a post-disaster needs assessment request and was making preparations for an international donors' conference to raise funds for flood recovery efforts.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.